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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0682  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2274  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2335  
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY 0020  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0168  
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0030  
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY 0006  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0060  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0308  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 0175  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0051  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0182  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 0151  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0197  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 1550  
RUEHNCS/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000396

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2017  
TAGS: PREL PHUM UNSC BM MY  
SUBJECT: BURMA: MALAYSIA NOT FOCUSED ON NEXT STEPS

REF: A. STATE 20000  
    1B. KUALA LUMPUR 70 - MALAYSIA OPPOSES  
          INTERNATIONALIZATION  
    1C. KUALA LUMPUR 40 - MALAYSIA HESITANT ON BURMA

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

Summary

11. (C) Malaysia has "no new initiative" in mind for Burma and appears unfocused on next steps, according to our meetings with several Malaysian Foreign Ministry officials and a prominent government-linked think tank. One official in charge of UN matters questioned whether Malaysia would actively support the appointment of a higher-powered special envoy, believing Burma likely would stonewall such an approach. Following the Cebu summits in January, Malaysia did not push for Burma to respond to ASEAN overtures, according to the senior official in charge of ASEAN affairs. These conversations suggest Malaysia at this point is more willing to disengage, rather than consider meaningful next steps. End Summary.

MFA - Lack of New Thinking

12. (C) Malaysia has "no new initiative" in mind for Burma, the Foreign Ministry's Under Secretary for Multilateral Political Affairs Shahrul Ikram told polchief February 28 in response to ref A demarche. Shahrul, whose responsibilities cover Burma from a UN angle (not relative to ASEAN), qualified this by saying that this did not rule out a new ASEAN approach, which Shahrul understood Singapore backed, implying that Malaysia was less interested. Regarding the appointment of a strong special envoy, Shahrul cautioned that the Burmese regime would stonewall an envoy seen as too aggressive in pushing a democracy or a perceived Western

agenda, which would not allow the envoy to carry out his/her full role. Consequently, Shahrul questioned whether his government would actively support such a move. (Comment: Other MFA officials dealing with Burma were unavailable or unwilling to meet with us over the past two weeks despite repeated requests. End Comment.)

Not Pressing for Burma's Response

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¶3. (C) During a January 31 debrief of the Cebu summits (prior to ref A demarche instructions), the Foreign Ministry's Director General for ASEAN, Hussein Haniff, expressed frustration with Burma, but signaled no Malaysian intention to press the issue. Burma had not done enough in response to previous ASEAN concerns, Hussein remarked, and had not given ASEAN any ammunition to use in Burma's defense against international criticism. He noted that ASEAN did not want Burma to become a drag on community building and goals of greater regional integration over the long-term. Hussein implied that if Burma completed the drafting of its new constitution and released political prisoners, these two steps would constitute an "end state" that would satisfy Malaysia and ASEAN. We reminded Hussein that the majority of UNSC members voted in favor of the January Burma resolution and that this issue would continue to generate a great deal of U.S. and international concern. In response to polchief's question, Hussein would not specify any actions or time frame for ASEAN "constructive engagement" on Burma. Hussein indicated that it was up to Burma to respond to ASEAN's latest overtures and comments from Cebu, but ASEAN or at least Malaysia was not pressing for a response.

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"No Longer a Priority"

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¶4. (C) Mohamed Jawhar bin Hassan, Chairman of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS, a prominent government-linked think tank), meeting with polchief March 1, was pessimistic that ASEAN or the UN could mount any important new initiative on Burma that could have an impact at this point. The conditions are not right, said Jawhar, who serves as an unofficial advisor to the GOM on various foreign policy issues. At this juncture ASEAN has both limited leverage and limited interest in working on democratic change in Burma. ASEAN and UN leverage is limited by Burma's support from China and India, and if ASEAN pushed too hard Burma would choose to leave the club. Thailand is out of the game because of its own difficulties and lack of democracy after the coup. Some other members, including Malaysia, would not put much effort into such diplomacy, particularly if it were couched primarily in terms of promoting democracy, as their own democratic credentials could come under scrutiny. "Myanmar is no longer a priority for ASEAN," Jawhar concluded. At best, ASEAN members could consistently make Burma "feel uncomfortable and inadequate" within the grouping, biding time until the regional dynamic changed.

Comment

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¶5. (C) Malaysia's disappointment with Burma, as a stain on ASEAN's reputation, has not translated into an eagerness to focus on meaningful next steps. Instead, our conversations suggest that Malaysia is more willing to disengage from the Burma issue for the time being. The Embassy will continue to encourage the Malaysian government to support international and regional efforts to promote positive, democratic change in Burma.

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